The Problem in The South

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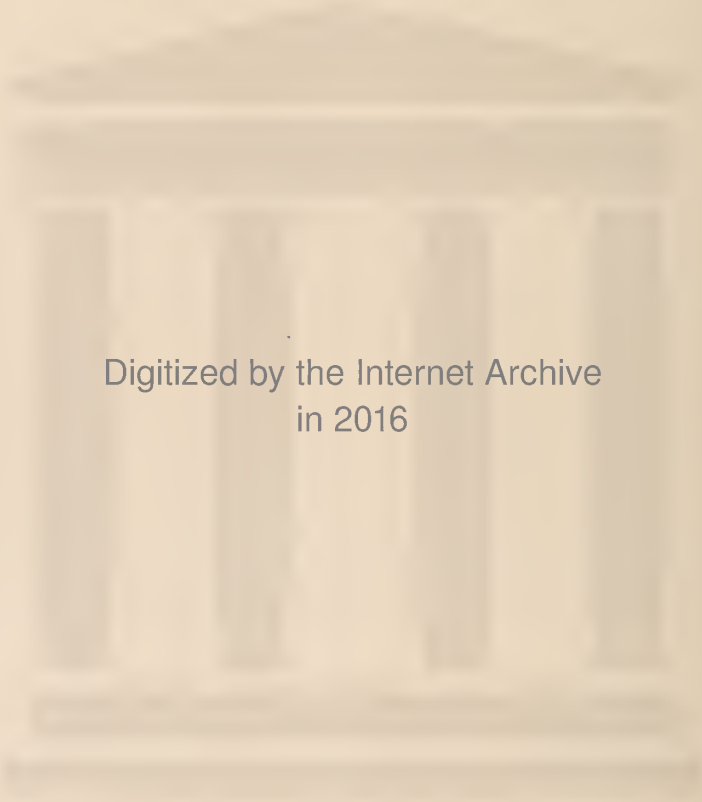

THE PROBLEM IN THE SOUTH

Nothing could be more erroneous than the common impression in the South that the public school is a northern or New England invention. The fact is, that Thomas Jefferson was the first conspicuous advocate in this country of free education in common schools supported by local taxation as well as of state aid to higher institutions of learning. To him the schoolhouse was the fountain-head of happiness, prosperity and good government, and education was the "holy cause" to which he devoted the best thought and efforts of his life. According to Jefferson, the objects of the public school were:

1 To give to every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business.

2 To enable him to calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts, and his accounts in writing.

3 To improve, by reading, his morals and faculties.

4 To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge, with competence, the functions confided to him by either.

5 To know his rights; to exercise, with order and justice, those he retains; to choose, with discretion, the fiduciary of those he delegates, and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor, and with judgment.

6 And in general, to observe, with intelligence and faithfulness, all the social relations under which he shall be placed.

Jefferson's educational plan, which he prepared for the state of Virginia, provided, first, "for elementary schools in every county, 'which will place every householder within three miles of a school; district schools, which will place every father within a day's ride of a college where he may dispose of his son; a university in a healthy and central situation.'"

Where will you find a better system of public education than this? Jefferson succeeded in founding a state university, but an aristocratic organization of society rendered

it impossible for even Jefferson to establish a complete system of public schools. Schools for poor children were established in Virginia, as in other southern states, but she had no system of public schools, properly speaking, until the civil war had destroyed her old institutions and so prepared the way.

Jefferson devoted the best portion of his life to the establishment of the University of Virginia, but he never advocated university education at the expense of the public schools. He labored for all forms of public education, but he evidently considered the common school the most important. He says in a letter to Cabell: "Were it necessary to give up either the primary or the university I would rather abandon the last, because it is safer to have a whole people respectably enlightened than a few in a high state of science and many in ignorance. This last is the most dangerous state in which a nation can be. All the nations and governments of Europe are proofs of it." The aristocratic attitude of the colleges of the day angered him, and he urged, in a letter to Cabell (Nov. 28,

1820) that "the friends of this university (the University of Virginia) take the lead in proposing and effecting a practical scheme of elementary schools and assume the character of friends rather than opponents of that object." Jefferson taught that the chief duty of the state institution for higher education is the promotion of the interest of public schools of all grades. The state university or state college which is indifferent to the interest of the public schools, is a monstrosity that should not be tolerated for a single year.

The Father of Democracy believed in an educational qualification for the suffrage. Said he, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be." Speaking of the new constitution of Spain in 1814, he said: "There is one provision which will immortalize its inventors. It is that which, after a certain epoch, disfranchises every citizen who cannot read and write. This is new and is the fruitful germ of the improvement of everything good and the correction of everything imperfect in the present con-

stitution. This will give you an enlightened people and an energetic public opinion, which will control and enchain the aristocratic spirit of the government."

Our duty to the new time in the South is the duty of educating all the people. It is the task set by Jefferson for Virginia in 1779, only changed and made more urgent by the extension of suffrage to another race. This is the real southern problem: How shall we educate and train the people? It is the problem of the whole country, in fact. How shall we educate all the people for intelligent citizenship, for complete living, and the true service of their God and fellow-men?

Our conception of public education has grown very greatly in these last years. It has grown in two ways: first, in content, and second, in kind. This conception now includes every human being; we realize, now, that all must be educated—that every human being has a right to an education. God has a purpose in every soul He sends into the world. The poorest, most helpless infant is not an accident, a few molecules of matter,

merely, but a "plan of God," as Phillips Brooks has said, destined to do a definite work in the universe; it is a part of the divine plan of creation, and, as such, deserves to be trained for its work. This, it seems to me, is the fundamental argument for universal education—that every child has a right to a chance in life, because God made him and made him to do something.

Our conception has also grown in kind; it now includes all training which fits the man for better living and service. "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," says St. Paul. Not perfect for his own self-satisfaction merely, but perfect for service; and not thoroughly furnished and equipped with every tool required for his work, merely for the purpose of completeness, as the king's palace is furnished, to be looked at, but thoroughly furnished unto *all good works*. The primary object of education is, perhaps, to make the man perfect, but the ultimate object is service. And not one kind of service merely, as we used to think, or even a few kinds of

service, like the four learned professions—law, medicine, teaching and preaching—the only callings for educated boys in the old days, but *all good works*, all professions in life, are the ends of education.

All forms of service are equally honorable. Each profession demands the trained man. The aim of education is to discover what each person can do and to train him to do it.

So, also, we have come to realize at last that there is no aristocracy in education. There is no particular class to be educated, for education is for all. It is not a matter of higher education for one class and lower education for another. For, correctly speaking, there is no higher education and no lower education, except in order of time; in order of merit there is no primary education and no secondary education; properly speaking, there is no scientific education, for all education should be scientific; and no technical education, for all education should be technical in the sense that it is applicable to the work of life. These terms only describe imaginary parts of our education, which

are not scientifically different. We make too much of these terms. Let's take a broader view of the great subject and understand, once for all, that it is only *education*, training, the all-education of all, the education of all men to do all the work for which God made them.

Our mistake has been in supposing that each one was made of the same metal and could be molded in the same old mold of the classical curriculum. We are come now to know that there are as many molds as there are men; that each human soul is a unique monad—to be trained in accordance with the laws of his own being.

Universality and diversity are thus the two principles of education. Each soul has a right to an education, and that education should be in accordance with his God-given nature. These are the principles that underlie all systems of public education. Testing our public schools in the South by them, we will see finally how wretchedly we have failed.

In the first place, how fully have we

applied the principle of universality, that is, the education of all the people? Our doctrine supposes an equal opportunity for an elementary education, at least, for every child in the commonwealth. Have we provided this? We well know we have not.

But we must consider our problem more nearly and in more detail. Our problem is the education of all the people of the South. First, who are this people? In 1900 these states south of the Potomac and east of the Mississippi contained, in round numbers, 16,400,000 people, 10,400,000 of them white and 6,000,000 black. In these states there are 3,981,000 white and 2,420,000 colored children of school age (5 to 20 years), a total of 6,401,000. They are distributed among the states as follows:

	White	Colored	Total
Virginia . . .	436 000	269 000	705 000
West Virginia .	342 000	15 000	357 000
North Carolina.	491 000	263 000	754 000
South Carolina.	218 000	342 000	560 000
Georgia . . .	458 000	428 000	886 000
Florida . . .	110 000	87 000	197 000
Alabama. . .	390 000	340 000	730 000
Mississippi . .	253 000	380 000	633 000
Tennessee . .	590 000	191 000	781 000
Kentucky . .	693 000	105 000	798 000
Total . .	3 981 000	2 420 000	6 401 000

What an army of young people to be educated! How they are marching on! Many of them are already beyond our help; all will be in less than 10 years; and still they come marching up from the cradles into American citizenship.

The important question is, what are we in the South doing for these children? Let us see! Only 60 per cent of them were enrolled in the schools in 1900. The average daily attendance was only 70 per cent of those enrolled. Only 42 per cent are actually at school. One half of the negroes get no schooling whatever. One white child in five is left wholly illiterate. Careful analysis of the reports of state superintendents showing the attendance by grades, indicates that the average child, whites and blacks together, who attends school at all stops with the third grade. In North Carolina the average citizen gets only 2.6 years, in South Carolina 2.5 years, in Alabama 2.4 years of schooling, both private and public. In the whole South the average citizen gets only 3 years of schooling of all kinds in his entire

life; and what schooling it is! This is the way we are educating these citizens of the republic, the voters who will have to determine the destinies not only of this people but of millions of others beyond the seas. Have we not missionary work enough to do here at our own doors without going to Cuba, Porto Rico or the Philippines?

But why is it that the children get so little education? Have we no schools in the country? Yes, but what kind of schools? The average value of a school property in North Carolina is $180, in South Carolina $178, in Georgia $523, and in Alabama $212. The average salary of a teacher in North Carolina is $23.36, in South Carolina $23.20, in Georgia $27, and in Alabama $27.50. The schools are open in North Carolina an average of 70.8 days, in South Carolina 88.4, in Georgia 112, and in Alabama 78.3. The average expenditure per pupil in average attendance is, in North Carolina $4.34, in South Carolina $4.44, in Georgia $6.64, and in Alabama $3.10 per annum. In other words, in these states, in

schoolhouses costing an average of $276 each, under teachers receiving the average salary of $25 a month, we are giving the children in actual attendance 5 cents worth of education a day for 87 days only in the year. This is the way we are schooling the children. Is it any wonder that they do not attend school when we provide no more for them?

Now behold the results in the adult people! Figures for illiteracy are a poor index of the condition of the people as regards education, but they certainly signify much. Comparing the percentages of white illiterates over 21 years of age in the southern states since 1840, we find that while they increased during and immediately after the civil war, they have decreased very slowly since. These percentages in typical southern states have just gotten back to where they were in 1850. In other words, among the whites of the South we have as large a proportion of illiterate men over 21 years of age as we had 50 years ago. In a half century we have made no progress in lift-

ing the dark cloud of ignorance from our own race. You will be startled, as I was, at this statement, but hear. In 1900 the percentage of illiterates among males over 21—native whites, mind you, the sons of native parents—was, in Virginia 12.5, in North Carolina 19, in South Carolina 12.6, in Georgia 12.1, in Alabama 14.2, in Tennessee 14.5, and in Kentucky 15.5. In Mississippi it is only 8.3, a marked difference directly traceable to their better schools, established some 12 years ago. These are not negroes, but grown white men, the descendants of the original southern stock.

In the second place, let us consider how schools stand as regards the principle of diversity—the education of every man in accordance with his God-given nature. Of all the public schools in the country perhaps those of the South are the most completely devoted to the "three R's," which some one has described as "little arithmetic, less reading, and least writing." Having received their methods from the

church schools, the colleges for higher education were also devoted almost exclusively to the classics, philosophy, and theology. These facts are too well known to need amplification.

The South is an agricultural section; its people must always support themselves by the rural arts. The problem of the South, therefore, like most sections of our country, in fact, is the problem of the rural schools. The problem of making money enough to support a good system of public schools is the problem of improving the agricultural production. Until the farmer can make more he cannot give much more for the support of schools. Before the people in the sparsely settled rural districts can build worthy schools they must have productive farms and good roads to take their produce to market. The campaign for better schools is, therefore, closely associated with that for good roads and for the improvement of agriculture. In fact, these three things must all go forward together. The methods of agriculture must

be raised throughout the country, and good roads must be built, before the people can support rural schools worthy the name.

Our special problem, therefore, is the establishment of rural schools where the elements of natural science and industrial arts are taught. Of all sections of our country, the South is thus most in need of industrial education of all kinds.

The indifference to education among country people grows out of a misunderstanding of what education is. The people are sick of the old education. The true education supports the life that the man or the woman is to lead; it is training for complete living. How absurd, yes, how wicked it is then to train the farmer's children, who must live in contact with nature on the farm, in a fashion that fits them only to be bookkeepers or saleswomen in a city. The trouble with the old education was that it educated all of the bright young people out of the country. The new education is related to the economic life of the people and prepares them

for the industries in which they are to make their living. The true education trains men to think right, on a straight line, to feel right, to will right, to do right—and so *to be right;* it makes character—not merely abstract goodness, but practical efficiency—the character that does good things!

There are many great problems before the southern people, but the greatest problem we have to solve in this generation is that of the rural industrial school.

Such is the situation that confronts us, such is the problem we must solve. The great question is, How shall all the people of the South be educated and trained for actual life? Who is to do this work? Shall individuals do it? Shall the churches do it? We have relied upon them largely in the past, and they have indeed done noble work for southern people, as for the people of all sections of our country. We need the church schools, but we know at the same time that the churches can never educate all the people. We have come to believe with Horace Mann that: "Every follower

of God and friend of mankind will find the only sure means of carrying forward the particular reform to which he is devoted in universal education. In whatever department of philanthropy he may be engaged, he will find that department to be only a segment of the great circle of beneficence of which universal education is the center and circumference."

The churches must take part in the work of universal education; every agency for the advancement of the interests of humanity may and should help in this great work; but the state is the only agency which can reach all the people. The state should encourage all societies and individuals to aid in this work. But it makes no difference how many of them are in the field; it must take upon itself the great burden of educating all the people. Education is the best preventive of crime, it is the only method of preparing men for intelligent and faithful citizenship, it is the best method of increasing the productivity of the people and so increasing the wealth of the state.

All this is true, but we do not rest the argument for state education upon this alone. It is the duty of the state to educate the entire population because it is the only possible way in which the entire population can be educated and trained; and every soul has a right to this opportunity for training.

If this is true, everything the state possesses should be dedicated to the cause of education first of all. As each citizen holds all his property in trust for the good of all, so the state, made up of us all, holds all its wealth in trust for the benefit of all its members. It is the *commonwealth*, the wealth of all.

But is wealth—the material things of life—the essence of the commonwealth? What constitutes the state—the material possessions of its people? No, as important as material wealth is, it does not constitute the commonwealth. What, then, constitutes the state—the men and women of today? No, as influential as they are, they do not make a

state. What, then, constitutes the state—the fathers who won our liberties and the mothers who trained our great men? No, as brave and good as they were, they alone do not form the state of today. What, then, does constitute the commonwealth? The successive generations of men and women taken collectively, all past, all present, and all to come, these constitute the commonwealth. As the people of the past owed a duty to us, so we owe a duty to all who follow us. All the property of the commonwealth, all the mind, intellect and soul of all its people, all its past glory, and its present power—all the state has been, is, and will be, is pledged for the education of all its youth. The commonwealth *exists* only for the children of today and those of the future. To rob them of the opportunity for education is, then, the greatest crime of which the state can be guilty.

This is not only Jefferson's doctrine, it is the *true* meaning of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; this is

what the Master meant when He said, "Suffer little children to come unto me"; and this is the significance of His parting charge, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me."